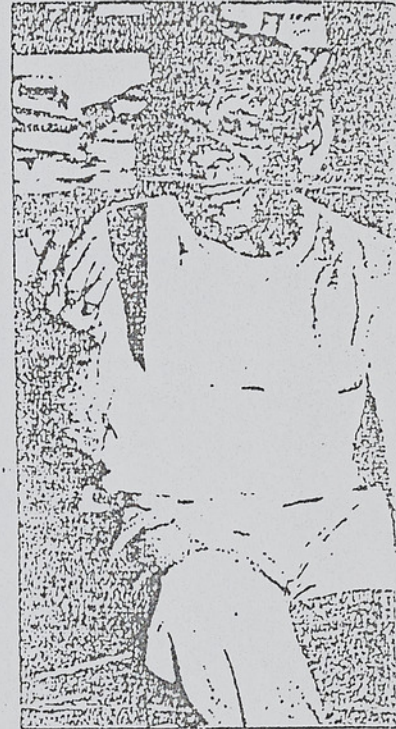




Joe and a friend having a chat. Behind them are some of Joe's paintings.

Joe tells us about one of his ambitions — to study with great artists in America and Europe.



# JOE MASEKO -

## Painting his way to success

*Joe Maseko has taught himself many things - not least of which is that there is beauty wherever you want to see it. This philosophy has helped him fight against a lack of education and make a success of himself as an artist*

by IKE MOTSAPI  
photographs by DUMI NDLOVU

**S**OME people with little, or no, education don't try hard to do anything with their lives — others try constantly to upgrade themselves. Artist Joe Maseko is one of these people.

Although he only went as far as Standard 1 at school, Joe taught himself to paint with watercolours, learned to speak and write English by practising and correcting himself with the help of a tape recorder, and through township scenes painted on paper and cardboard has built himself an amazing success story.

"I didn't get very far at school, so my main form of communication was through drawing," says

Joe who started painting — mainly with watercolours — in 1959. Hungry for knowledge, Joe started reading art books and studying the great painters of every age. He taught himself art techniques and the history of art by borrowing books and spending long hours studying in municipal libraries.

It was then that Joe realised that township scenes needed to be put into drawings so that others could see them. Today township scenes are his main subject matter.

"There is beauty even in ugliness," says Joe, "it depends entirely how people learn to see things. This is what I am trying to do — to let people learn

through my paintings. There is beauty everywhere if you want to see it."

Joe has experienced both important achievements and disappointments in his career.

His early artistic career began with him exhibiting his township scene paintings at the Joubert Park Artists Under The Sun Exhibitions. His inclusion in the 1961 "Fame And Promises" Exhibition at the Alder Fielding Gallery really got his career going because he made a good impression on art critics. One of the highlights of his early career was an exhibition of his works at the Hilton Hotel in Denver,



Colorado, USA in 1973. Today, with 20 years of art experience behind him, Joe can boast of one-man art exhibitions of his work in West Germany, USA and in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

There have been the bad times, too. Like when Joe was asked to move out of the Colosseum Theatre in Johannesburg, (from where he was running a gallery called The Art Mart), because it was due to be demolished to make way for a supermarket. He saw his dreams of owning a gallery in the centre of town crash, but he didn't let it affect him too much.

**It's important to encourage young artists and to make the public appreciate our own art more**

Today he still has hopes to open up a gallery of his own and is in fact planning to do so with the help of some of his admirers. Mr Steve Burger, Director of Community Development with the West Rand Development Board, told me that he was doing his best to help Joe — whom

he thinks of as one of the finest artists around — make his dream come true.

Talking about the gallery he plans to open in his backyard, Joe says: "This is the first time that so many people who are interested in my work are trying to help me. I know there will be a lot of changes in my work. I have a lot of feelings inside me which I have no idea how to paint. I do not know how to learn to interpret these feelings except by talking, to and working with great artists."

He adds that the gallery will be a good thing because many — both local and overseas — visitors cram into his tiny Orlando home to buy or place orders for their own works of art. "With the establishment of the art gallery tourists will be able to go home with something authentically African," he says.

Joe hopes to encourage young Black artists, and to draw attention to their work through the gallery. He also feels it is important to encourage young Black artists to make the Black public aware of what they are achieving, at the same time as making the general public more appreciative of indigenous art.

An equally important point, in Joe's mind, is to try and make the Black community aware of the value of art as an investment — not only a financial one but a cultural one as well.

"That way children will grow up in an environment rich in their own history, culture and traditions," says this very special man who has beaten the odds to make a success of himself.

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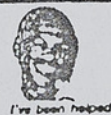
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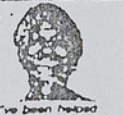
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